

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Comanche County Courthouse

Other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

201 South New York Avenue

not for publication

Coldwater

vicinity

state Kansas

code KS

county Comanche

code 033

zip code 67029

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_\_\_ nationally X statewide \_\_\_\_\_ locally.

(\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Richard S. Parkatz  
Signature of certifying official

3/5/02  
Date

Kansas State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

\_\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet

\_\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet

\_\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_ other, (explain:)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

Property Name Comanche County CourthouseCounty and State Comanche County, KansasPage 2**5. Classification**

## Ownership of Property

☐ private  
☒ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

## Category of Property

☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

## No. of Resources within Property

contributing	noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a  
multiple property listing.)

Historic County Courthouses of Kansas

No. of contributing resources previously  
listed in the National Register:

0**6. Functions or Use**

## Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT: County Courthouse

## Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT: County Courthouse**7. Description**

## Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Classical Revival

## Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation BRICKWalls BRICKSTONE: LimestoneRoof OTHER: Composition Material

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more  
continuation sheets.)

Property Name Comanche County CourthouseCounty and State Comanche County, KansasPage 3**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance  
(Enter categories from instructions.)ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1927/1928-50

Significant Dates

N/APOLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Routledge & Hertz, ArchitectThomas Howard, Contractor

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Property Name Comanche County CourthouseCounty and State Comanche County, KansasPage 4**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing  
(36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings  
Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Specify repository:

Library and Archives Division, Kansas  
State Historical Society; Topeka, Kansas

Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of property <1

UTM References

1	<u>1/4</u>	<u>4/7/1/1/4/0</u>	<u>4/1/2/4/4/9/0</u>	3	<u>/</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>/</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	4	<u>/</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>	<u>/ / / / /</u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title Dana Cloud and Sally F. Schwenkorganization Historic Preservation Services, LLCdate April 30, 2000street & number 818 Grand Boulevard, Suite 1150telephone (816) 221-5133city or town Kansas Citystate Missouri zip code 64106**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets.

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)name Comanche Countystreet & number 201 South New York Avenuetelephone (785) 582-2361city or town Coldwaterstate KS zip code 67029

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Historic County Courthouses of Kansas  
Comanche County Courthouse  
Coldwater, Kansas

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**DESCRIPTION**

The Comanche County Courthouse is a Classical Revival style, four-story masonry structure that occupies the central portion of a full square block south of the Coldwater, Kansas central business district. It shares the block with a parking lot located to the east of the courthouse [*Figure 1: City Map of Coldwater, Kansas*]. With the primary façade facing west onto New York Street, the courthouse is rectangular in plan and measures 75 feet wide by 45 feet deep by 35 feet high [*Figure 2: Existing Site Plan*]. The structure is buff brick with dressed limestone detailing, which accents the windowsills, sill course, cornice, and projecting pavilion at the primary entrance. A simple parapet and cornice delineate the flat roof. Except for door replacements, this property has excellent architectural integrity and retains nearly all of its original exterior and interior features [*Photographs #1 and #2*]. Erected in 1927–1928 as a county courthouse, the structure continues to serve as a county courthouse.

The courthouse has eleven bays on the east and west façades and five bays on the north and south façades. The exterior of the courthouse is smooth, buff brick laid in common bond with dressed limestone detailing. Dressed limestone accents the first floor sill course and remaining windowsills and lintels. Dressed limestone also defines the decorative masonry features such as the primary entrance pavilion, the door hood at the north entrance and the cornice. Three courses of recessed brick define the base of the courthouse [*Photograph #3*].

The courthouse has two public entrances, one on the west façade and one on the north façade. The primary entrance is on the west façade and features a projecting pavilion. Two Ionic columns, with bases that are approximately seven feet high, flank the main entrance doors and tripartite windows. The columns also support a stepped parapet and entablature that reads “Comanche County.” Flanking the primary entrance are simple torcheres [*Photographs #4 and #5*]. A flight of stairs, which is in need of repair, leads the secondary entrance on the north façade. A limestone hood that has decorative brackets and dentils covers the entrance.

For the most part, the original fenestration remains intact. The only major alteration to the building exterior is the replacement of the original entrance doors with metal frame, storefront doors that feature sidelights and mirrored glass [*Photographs #3 and #4*]. Window sashes and encasements need repair. The tripartite windows of the primary entrance pavilion have nine-over-nine light, double-hung sashes; opaque transom panels replace the upper grouping of windows. The second floor courtroom windows on the east façade have 12-over-12 light, double-hung sashes and multi-paned transoms. The ground floor windows have three-over-three light, double-hung sashes. The remaining windows have six-over-six light, double-hung sashes. The addition of several window air-conditioning units somewhat compromises the exterior appearance of the courthouse; however, these may be removed without damaging the building’s historic materials [*Photographs #1 and #2*].

The floor plan and use of the courthouse are typical of the majority of Kansas courthouses built in the early twentieth century. A grand staircase at the primary (west) side of the courthouse accesses the north-south corridors of each floor [*Photograph #6, #8 and #9*]. An exterior door at the back (east) of the building accesses the ground floor. North and west entrances access the first floor, which houses the main administrative offices such as the county clerk, register of deeds, county appraiser, and treasurer’s offices; once inside the west entrance, a flight of stairs leads to the first floor [*Figure 3: Existing First Floor Plan*]. The second floor houses the courtroom, judge’s chambers, economic development office, and clerk of the district court office [*Photographs #10 and #11*]. The third floor originally housed the jail but currently functions as a storage area.

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Historic County Courthouses of Kansas  
Comanche County Courthouse  
Coldwater, Kansas

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The interior design treatment is typical of the majority of Kansas courthouses built in the early twentieth century. Interior finishes consist of terrazzo flooring, pink marble wainscoting, oak doors and trim, plaster walls and ceilings, and an iron staircase with terrazzo treads [*Photographs #7, #8 and #9*]. Original light fixtures, including three large fixtures in the courtroom, are still in use throughout the building [*Photograph #10*].

The Comanche County Courthouse has excellent architectural integrity. Although metal frame, storefront doors with sidelights and mirrored glass replaced the original entrance doors, the majority of the original character-defining elements are unaltered and include the original fenestration patterns and windows, masonry, dressed limestone detailing, projecting pavilion, Ionic columns, and roofline. All of the interior features such as the terrazzo flooring, pink marble wainscoting, oak doors and trim, plaster walls and ceilings, iron staircase with terrazzo treads and light fixtures are also intact. The floor plan configuration of the each floor is intact as well. Overall, the Comanche County Courthouse not only has excellent architectural integrity, it is also in excellent condition as a result of the care and attention given to the maintenance of the structure by a succession of county commissioners.

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Historic County Courthouses of Kansas  
Comanche County Courthouse  
Coldwater, Kansas

**PHOTO LOG**

**Photographer:** Dana Cloud  
**Date of Photographs:** December 9, 1999  
**Location of Negatives:** Kansas State Historical Society  
Cultural Resources Division  
6425 S.W. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Topeka, Kansas 66615-1099

Photo #	Subject	Camera Direction
1.	Exterior of Courthouse	Northeast
2.	Exterior of Courthouse	Southwest
3.	Detail of North Entrance	South
4.	Detail of West (Main) Entrance	East
5.	Detail of Column Capital at West (Main) Entrance	East
6.	Main Staircase from Second to Third Floor	West
7.	Detail of Starting Newell of Main Staircase	Northwest
8.	First Floor Main Corridor	Southeast
9.	Main Staircase to First Floor	Northeast
10.	Main Courtroom on Second Floor	South
11.	Main Courtroom on Second Floor	Northeast

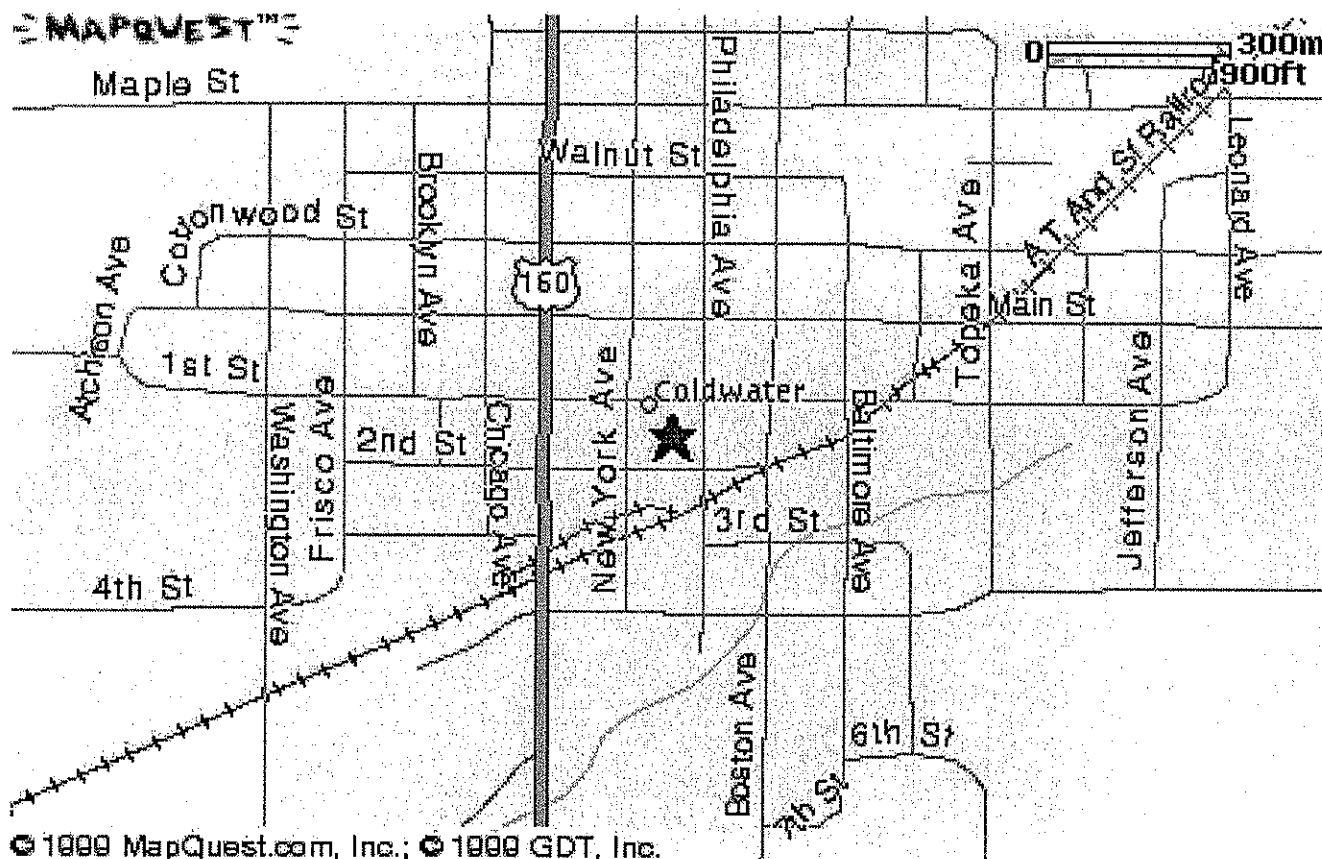
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Comanche County Courthouse  
Coldwater, Kansas

**Figure 1: City Map of Coldwater, Kansas**





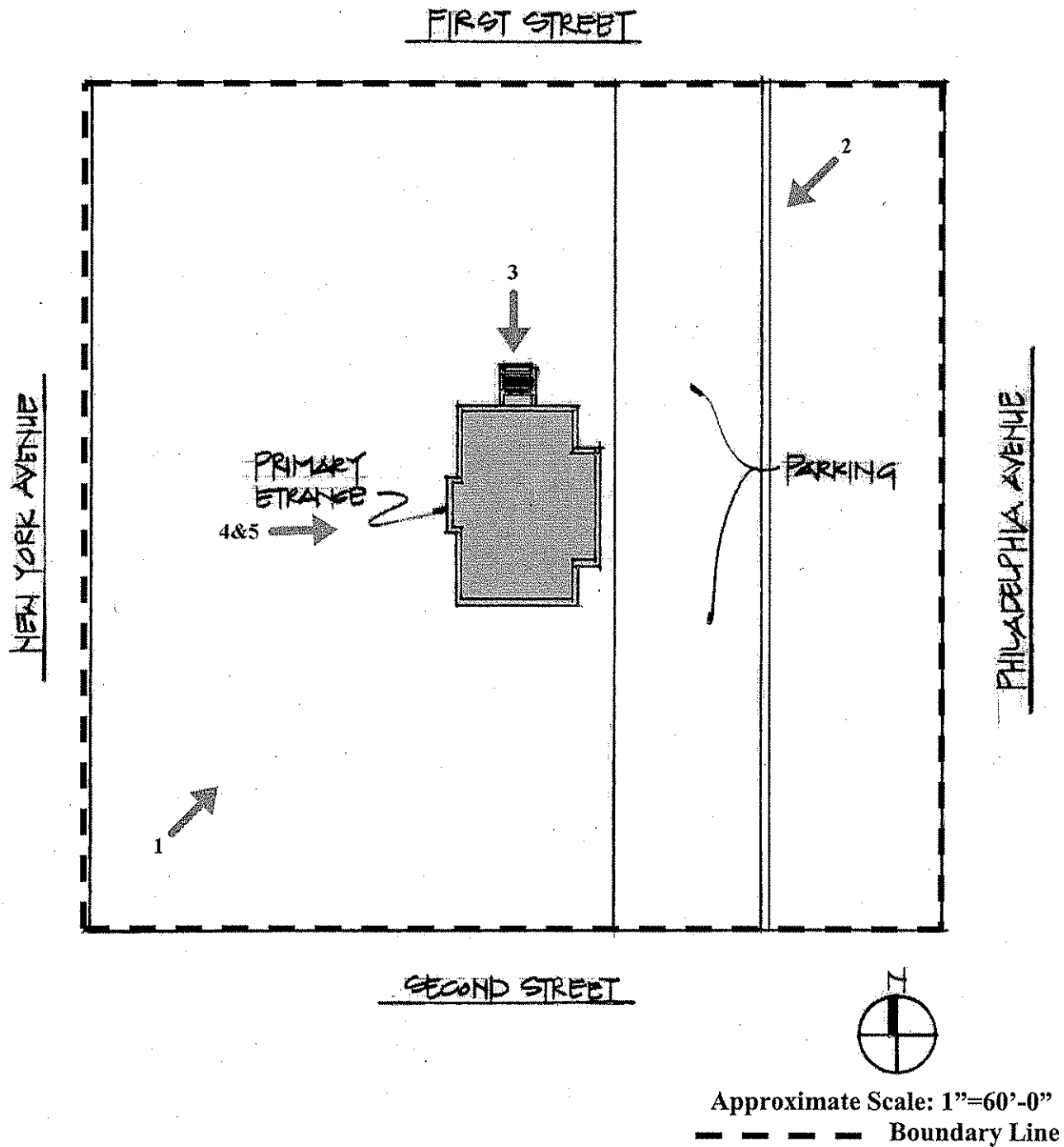
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Historic County Courthouses of Kansas  
Comanche County Courthouse  
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**Figure 2: Existing Site Plan**



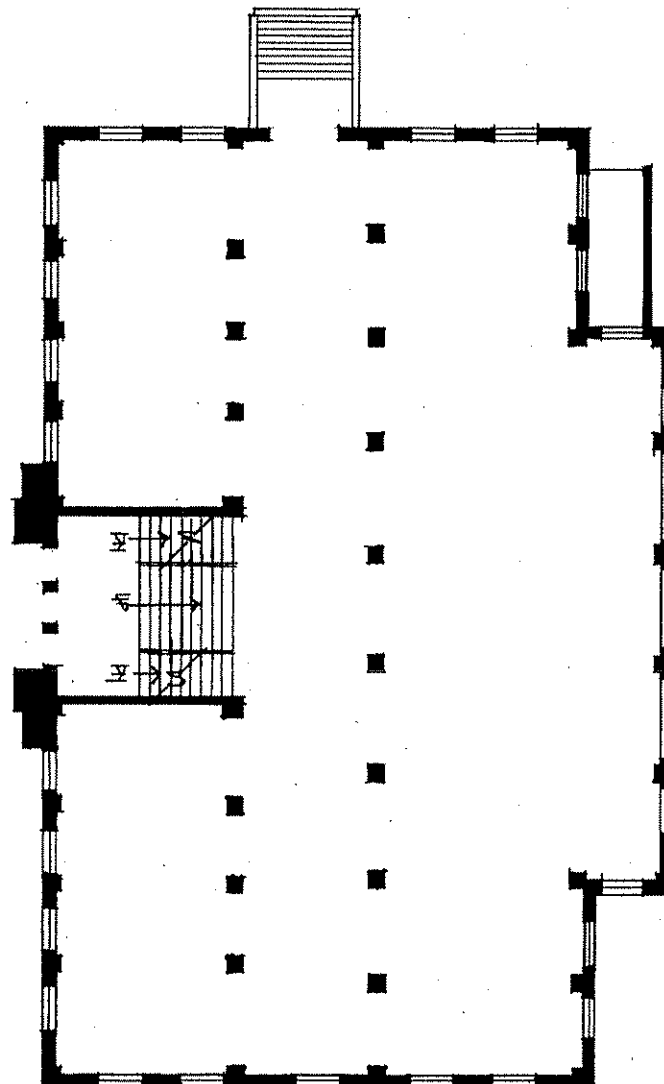
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**Figure 3: Existing First Floor Plan (Without Partitions)**



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Historic County Courthouses of Kansas  
Comanche County Courthouse  
Coldwater, Kansas

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Comanche County Courthouse, erected in 1927–1928, is historically significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of **POLITICS/GOVERNMENT** and under Criterion C in the area of **ARCHITECTURE** for its associations with the development of county courthouses in Kansas and with the firm of Routledge and Hertz, an influential Kansas architectural firm noted for its public architecture and its design of a number of Kansas county courthouses in the 1920s and 1930s. The historic significance of the Comanche County Courthouse is based on its associations with the history and development of Kansas county courthouses that are documented in the Multiple Property Form, "**Historic County Courthouses of Kansas.**" In particular, the property has direct associations to the historic contexts established in the Multiple Property form—"The Role of the County Courthouse in Kansas Communities 1856–1950," "Twentieth Century Kansas County Courthouses and Their Changing Use 1900–1950," and the Architecture of Kansas Courthouses 1861–1950." The property's association with the evolution of Kansas County Courthouses and their design dates to its construction in 1927–1928 and continues to 2000, the arbitrary 50-year cutoff date for determining eligibility of National Register properties. The property reflects typical courthouse plans, siting, and designs found in Kansas during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to retention of association and location, it has a high degree of architectural integrity and is a representative example of its property type. It exemplifies the work of a master courthouse architect noted for his Kansas courthouse designs. The property type and larger historic contexts relating to the significance of the Comanche County Courthouse are fully documented in the Multiple Property Form. The following commentary expands upon these larger contextual themes as they specifically relate to the Comanche County Courthouse and documents the property's significance.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Comanche County is located in southwest Kansas adjacent to the Oklahoma border. The county is sparsely populated with only three small towns: Coldwater, the county seat; and the communities of Wilmore and Protection. Highway 160 runs east and west, and Highway 183 runs north and south through the middle of the county.

Comanche County has somewhat fraudulent beginnings. In August 1873, C.C. Bemis from Hutchinson, Kansas organized a group of five men to establish the county. The group included Bemis, A.J. Mowry and James Dunlap of Doniphan County, Alexander Mills of Topeka, and Major L. J. Bowlis of Hutchinson. The five men appointed themselves as county officials. A buffalo hunter, whom Bemis' group met while camping in Comanche County, filled the remaining position of county attorney.

The task of taking the county census, which the State required to prove occupancy of the county, went to Al Upgegraff, also a buffalo hunter. Since there were no inhabitants of the county at the time, Upgegraff compiled a list of fictitious voters from a St. Joseph, Missouri directory. As a result, the state issued Bemis \$29,000 for a

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new courthouse, \$23,000 for the construction of bridges, \$2,500 for schools, and \$20,000 for general expenses.<sup>1</sup> A.J. Mowry elected himself to the state legislature, where he received an additional \$40,000 for county expenses.

The Kansas attorney general stepped in and declared the establishment of the county a fraud. He stated, "In this county there is not an acre of land or dollars worth of taxation, subject to taxation. Its sole inhabitants are the Cheyennes and the coyote, the wolf and the Arapahos and its organization is and always has been a fraud." Needless to say, state funding of Comanche County came to an abrupt halt. Bemis moved on to his next scam, leaving the future citizens of Comanche County with a debt they would continue to pay well into the twentieth century.

In 1888, the county, with a population of 5,000, legitimately organized and purchased a site for a courthouse.<sup>2</sup> A fire in 1921 destroyed the c.1890 wood, frame courthouse. The architecture firm of Routledge and Hertz of Hutchinson, Kansas designed the present courthouse, which they completed in 1927.<sup>3</sup>

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Comanche County Courthouse is significant under Criterion A for its associations with the second and third generation courthouses erected in the period between the end of World War I and the onset of the Great Depression. Its siting in open space on a square block adjacent to the commercial district is typical of common practices in Kansas during this period. The building and its setting convey distinct associations with the historic appearance of the property. The integrity of the building today conveys its original functions and its role in an agrarian county at the time of its construction.

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Comanche County Courthouse is architecturally significant as an excellent early example of the Kansas county courthouses designed by Routledge and Hertz. The firm was noted for its eclectic use of classical forms rendered in streamlined modern versions. Between 1927 and 1931 the firm designed a number of Kansas county courthouses using the Classical Revival style.<sup>4</sup>

The courthouses designed by Routledge & Hertz display the transition of Kansas courthouse design from the Classical Revival style to the Modern Movement Art Deco style. Routledge & Hertz' early courthouses—such as the Comanche and Gray County Courthouses, both built in 1927—are also Classical Revival in style and feature buff brick, limestone detailing, projecting pavilions at the primary façades, and simple cornice lines. The pavilions of both courthouses project from the three center bays of the building and are characterized by columns supporting an entablature. The Edwards County Courthouse (1928–1929) and Hodgeman County Courthouse

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Dewey, "Larceny on the Frontier; Gold in Courthouses that Didn't Exist," *Hutchinson News-Herald* (2 March 1952): 105–107. Vertical File. Kansas State Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> Author Unknown, "Old Comanche County Courthouse Burned," *Coldwater Western Star* (1 November 1921). Kansas State Historical Society, Cultural Resources Division, Vertical Files.

<sup>3</sup> Author Unknown, *Hutchinson Herald* (31 December 1927). Kansas State Historical Society, Cultural Resources Division, Vertical Files.

<sup>4</sup> Additional information on the firm is included in the Multiple Property Form.

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(1929–1930) reflect Routledge & Hertz' transition in design from the Classical Revival style to the Art Deco style. Although both courthouses continue to distinguish the primary entrance as a series of simple arched doorways in the central three bays and feature buff brick with limestone detailing, the façades appear flatter than those of their predecessors and do not feature columns. The firm's Finney County (1928–1929) and Sherman County (1931) courthouses reflect the architects' transition to Art Deco style design. Both courthouses feature stylized tile motifs and metalwork, and a vertical emphasis through the use of vertical strips of windows with spandrels [*Figure 4: Representative Examples of Kansas Courthouses Designed by Routledge & Hertz*]. The Comanche County Courthouse retains all of its exterior features, including fenestration, and serves as a representative example of Routledge & Hertz' early Classical Revival style courthouses.

The Comanche County Courthouse is also architecturally significant for its retention of its original floor plan configuration and hierarchy of space that is typical of many early twentieth century Kansas courthouses. Kansas courthouses of this period are generally defined by three or four floors, which have a hierarchy of functions that are located off a main corridor and accessed by one or more staircases. The ground floor is either at grade level or slightly sunken and houses the auxiliary functions such as the boiler room, facility manager's offices, toilets and storage. The finishes of this floor are often not as elaborate as the upper, more public floors. The first floor, which is the most highly utilized floor, is generally elevated from grade level and approached via an exterior grand staircase. The first floor houses offices frequently utilized by the public such as the county clerk, register of deeds, county treasurer, engineer, appraiser, and county commissioners' offices. The second floor houses the courtroom, judge's office, jury room, and the sheriff and court clerk's offices. The courtroom is nearly always on the opposite side of the primary entrance, just opposite of the central grand staircase, and is 1½ or two stories in height. The third floor historically housed the jail, although Comanche's county commissioners removed the jail from the Comanche County Courthouse. Otherwise, the Comanche County Courthouse retains this hierarchy of space and the ground floor through third floor configurations.

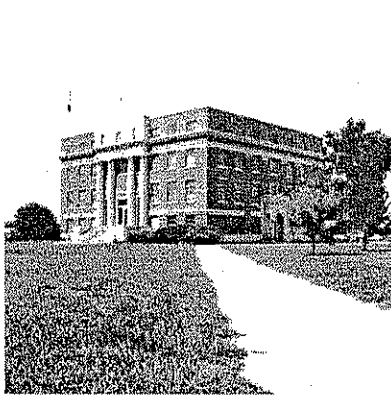
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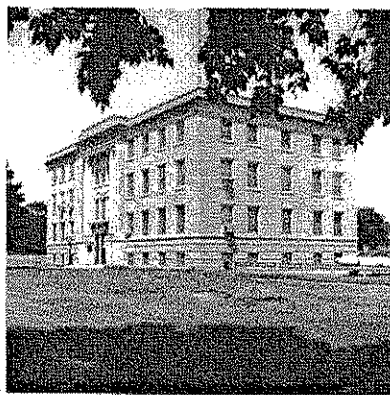
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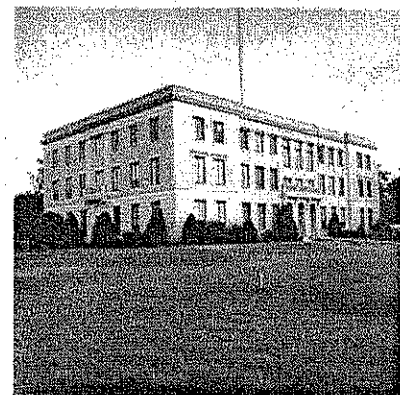
**Figure 4: Representative Examples of Kansas Courthouses Designed by Routledge & Hertz**



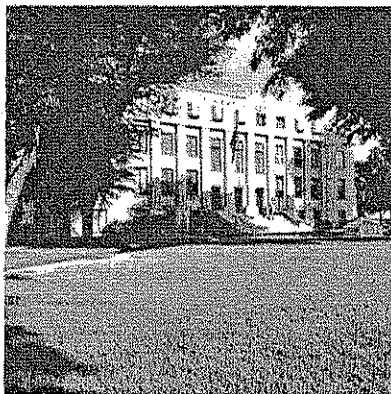
Gray County 1927



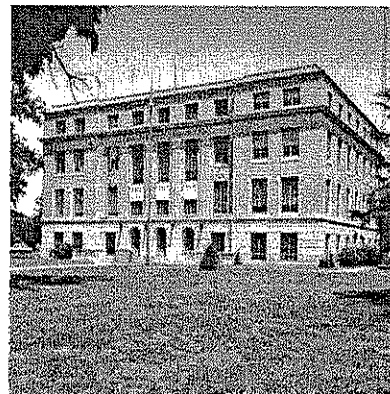
Comanche County 1927-1928



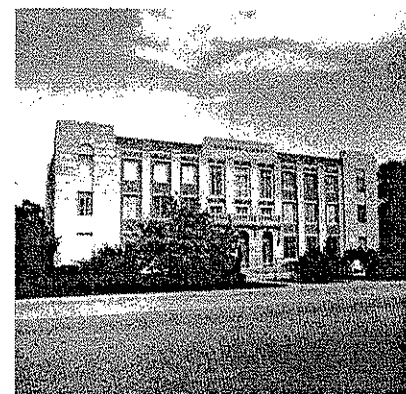
Edwards County 1928-1929



Finney County 1928-1929



Hodgeman County 1929-1930



Sherman County 1931

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Coldwater, Kansas

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Dewey, Ernest. "Larceny on the Frontier; Gold in Courthouses that Didn't Exist." *Hutchinson News-Herald* (March 2, 1952): 105-107. Kansas State Historical Society, Cultural Resources Division, Vertical Files.

Author Unknown. "Old Comanche County Courthouse Burned." *Coldwater Western Star* (November 1, 1921). Kansas State Historical Society, Cultural Resources Division, Vertical Files.

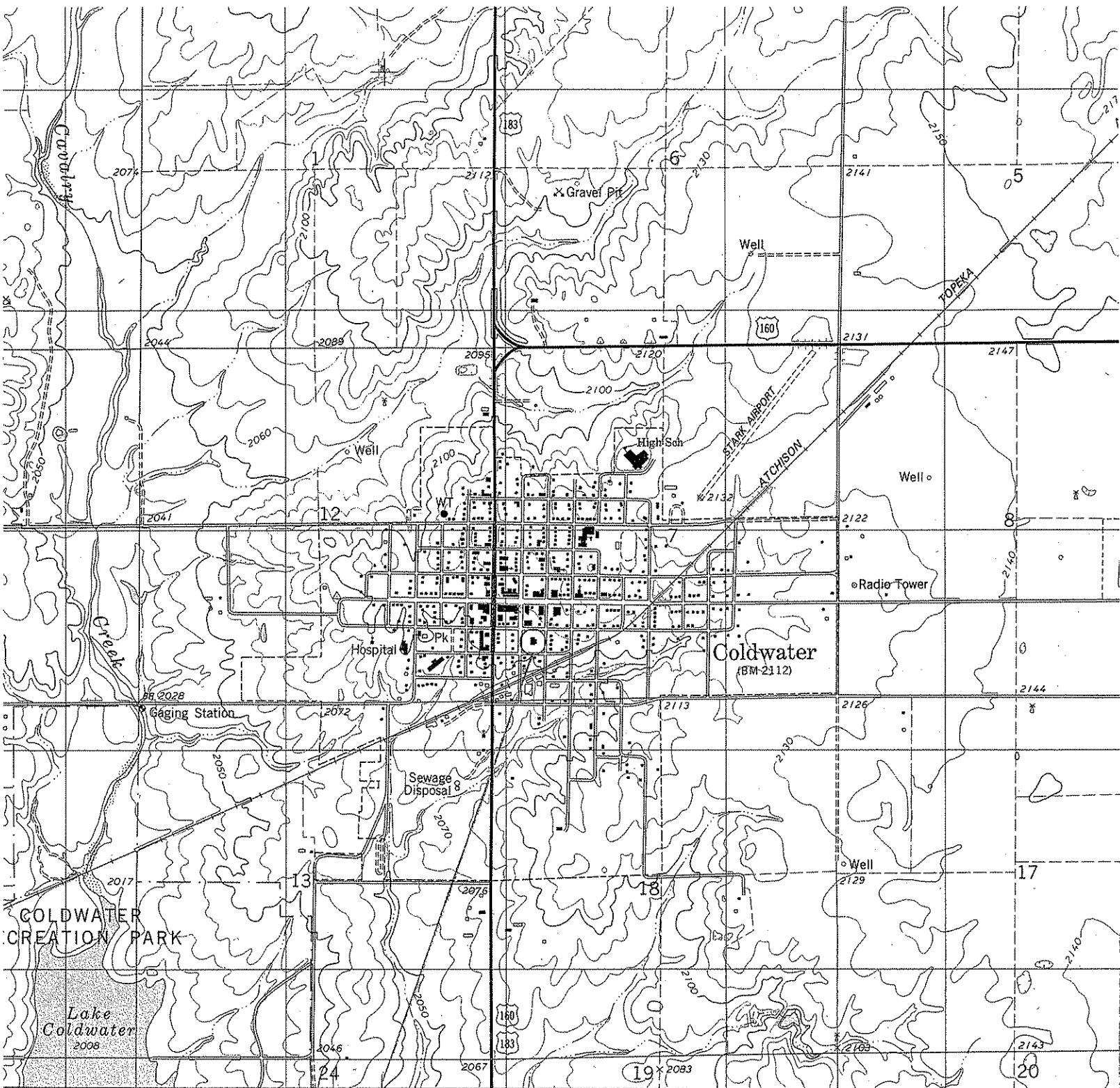
Author Unknown. *Hutchinson Herald* (December 31, 1927). Kansas State Historical Society, Cultural Resources Division, Vertical Files.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated property includes the entirety of Block 57 in the Original Town of Coldwater, Comanche County, Kansas and is bounded by the following: on the south, the northern boundary of Second Street; on the west, the eastern boundary of New York Avenue; on the north, the southern boundary of First Street; and on the east, the western boundary of Philadelphia Avenue.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary of the nominated property is based on the entirety of Block 57 for its traditional courthouse function. Natural boundaries are provided by Second Street, New York Avenue, First Street, and Philadelphia Avenue.



UTM GRID AND 1979 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

COMANCHE COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
COLDWATER, COMANCHE CO., KANSAS

UTM: 14/471140/4124490

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22 AND STATE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, LAWRENCE, KANSAS 66044

A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

UTM GRID AND 1979 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

COMANCHE COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
COLDWATER, COMANCHE CO., KANSAS

UTM: 14/471140/4124490